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Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*: Origin and Evolution of Evil from a Psychological Perspective

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Emily Brontë: Life and Context

Emily Jane Brontë was born on 30th July 1818 in the village of Thornton, in Yorkshire. She was the fifth of six children and her childhood was not idyllic. She lost her mother to cancer at the tender age of three, and two of her sisters followed. Being the child of a respected curate, food and clothing were never scarce, but care and understanding sometimes were. According to Robert Barnard (2000), Emily was defined by her solitude from early childhood. Although she did enjoy creating fantasy worlds with her sister Anne, she preferred having walks through the moors and spending time with animals. Even when she left to Roe Head Girls' School, she only lasted for a few months before she suffered from extreme homesickness. Her sister Charlotte stated that Emily desperately needed the noiseless, secluded, unrestricted and inartificial mode of life that only her home at Haworth could provide. She was said to have "the eyes of a half-tamed creature" (Barnard 9). More than likely, her solitariness, the pervasive presence of death and illness in her family and the untamed nature she was immersed in only sharpened her gifted mind. It is in these circumstances that she wrote her only novel and masterpiece *Wuthering Heights* (1847), short before tuberculosis took her at the age of thirty. *Wuthering Heights* is a colossal novel that has marked a milestone in the history of English literature. Emily was able to depict characters, behaviours and mental states that would only be explained by Sigmund Freud half of a century later. In her confinement in the English countryside, she was able to reach such depth in content and form that critics still today cannot possibly reach any satisfactory conclusion.

Moreover, one of her most obscure and attractive characters, Heathcliff, still lives to our days in the form of the everlasting figure of the Gothic Villain Hero. As

Atara Stein claims (2004) Heathcliff could certainly fit into the definition of the Byronic Hero who, very much like Manfred, is a man full of rage, violence and mystery whose passionate love has proved to destroy every innocent creature around him: "Emily Brontë, in her creation of Heathcliff, reveals a manifest ambivalence, she makes him simultaneously attractive and horrifying" […] "Heathcliff's ruthless brutality should contain a warning to Isabella […] Heathcliff's intensity, even if sadistic, proves irresistible" (4, 26).[1] Considering the outstanding literary legacy that his novel has left and, aware of the endless interpretations that it has received, the aim of this essay is to analyse the characters of Catherine and Heathcliff from their early childhood, with a special focus on their cruelty, sadism and masochism that define the paths they follow from children to adults. For this purpose, I will rely on some theories from psychoanalysis and psychology that suggest that their behaviours are more dependent on social and cultural aspects than on biological ones (Bowlby 1983; De Rosa 1998; McNierney 2016). The initial hypothesis is that Catherine had a normal upbringing, as she did not suffer from violence or deprivation of affect or education. However, my analysis will also explore how repression and class conscience shaped her inborn egotism, with hints of sadism from a very early age. On the other hand, Heathcliff did suffer abuses and rejection as a child. Yet, to what extent his actions were moved by love for Catherine or by love for revenge is a question that will remain open for interpretation, as Emily Brontë's complexity in the construction of both characters has proved to escape every attempt of being reduced by rationality and it will always depend on the reader (Bataille 13).

[1] This idea of the troubled, sadistic man whose love and violence are equally enthralling has subsisted to our present days in the form of mass culture productions such as the figure of Anakin in *Star Wars* (1977), Daniel Cleaver in *Bridget Jones Diary* (1996), Edward Cullen in *Twilight* (2005) and Christian Grey in *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2011), among others. So, Emily Brontë was able to imagine, barely with no tangible inspiration, and construct a type of male character that, although unrepeatable, would see himself emulated in the centuries to come.

1.2 Pervasive cruelty: *Wuthering Heights* as dark, violent and intense.

In his work *Literature and Evil* (1957) George Bataille points out Emily's "profound experience of the abyss of Evil" (9) and repeatedly insists on this idea: "though few people could have been more severe, more courageous or more proper, she fathomed the very depths of Evil" (9). Although the three sisters created a world of imagination together, in the intimacy of their day-by-day relationship, Emily kept her moral solitude where all her phantoms grew: "*Wuthering Heights* is surely the most beautiful and most profoundly violent love story […] She had the sort of knowledge which links love not only with clarity but also with violence and death" (10).

According to Hillis Miller, Emily Brontë distanced herself from the Romantic tradition, which considered that "the poet was a male power, inspired by a female muse […]. They make poetry a version of the family romance which relegates women to the role of mediators of male power – mothers, mistresses, sisters, Lucy figures at best" (85). By the same token, the Realistic tradition of the 19th century was immersed in what Jacques Derrida defined as "phallogocentrism" by which the male gaze is the privileged one in the construction of thought, thus leading to a form of male narration characterized by a godlike omniscient narrator, commonly interpreted as male. Emily Brontë managed to subvert this by conferring *Wuthering Heights* with a deep complexity of narration as well as a great amount of violence. Among other narrative techniques, she included multiple narrators, Lockwood and Nelly, embedded narrations, Isabella's letter to Nelly and Cathy's diary, time shifts and the absence of any reliable narrator that could be identified as the voice of the author, thereby frustrating the expectations of readers like Lockwood (85). Moreover, as Bataille states, she represented an appalling violence, cruelty and death in a way that could not be reduced

by rationality (13). This was not fruit of her inexperience as a writer, but rather the consequence of great mastery. She used the above-mentioned narrative techniques to disrupt the conventions, and to free herself and her art from the yoke of tradition, thus resisting any futile attempt to be successfully understood. Emily Brontë knew how to deprive us of the liberation of dissatisfaction, creating one of the most obscure, opaque and disturbing novels in history written by a woman.

Significantly enough, the pervading cruelty and harshness that permeates every word and every action in the novel deserves special attention. As Homans states (9), nature is one of Brontë's most powerful tools to endow the novel with a threatening, lurking frame that serves as a symbol for the mental state of the characters: "My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods. Time will change it, I'm well aware, as winter changes the trees. My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath-a source of little visible delight, but necessary" (Bronte 59). Or when Heathcliff departs from the Heights after overhearing a conversation between Nelly and Catherine in which Catherine claims that marrying him would degrade her. Right afterwards and in tears, Catherine runs to the moors in search for Heathcliff, embodying a sense of pain and suffering similar to the violent storm that beats the Heights:

> the storm came rattling over the Heights in full fury. There was a violent wind, as well as thunder, and either one or the other split a tree off at the corner of the building: a huge bough fell across the roof, and knocked down a portion of the east chimney-stack, sending a clatter of stones and soot into the kitchen fire. (61)

Not only did her depiction of nature shock readers but also the inherent violence of the supposedly most benevolent and innocent creatures: children. From a very young age, they manifest and experience a brutality that was uncommon in the literature of the

times: "'Take my colt, Gipsy, then!' said young Earnshaw. And I pray that he may break your neck: take him, and he damned, you beggarly interloper! and wheedle my father out of all he has: only afterwards show him what you are, imp of Satan" (27). Even babies suffer a staggering negligence: "an unwelcomed infant it was, poor thing! It might have wailed out of life, and nobody cared a morsel, during those first hours of existence" (119). Although most characters in the novel are violent and cruel, it is Catherine and Heathcliff the ones that deserve our attention. The latter, although appreciated by many, is known to be an unrepentant sinner, a violent, brutal and sadistic man whose passion-driven force does not conform to social conventions. However, his counterpart is not to be underestimated. Catherine's actions may come as veiled but, as will be shown, her motivations are as egotistic as Heathcliff's.

2. The Presence of Evil in Heathcliff and Catherine

2.1 Attachment Theory

As mentioned before, one of Emily's greatest achievements was to envisage psychological theories and mechanisms that were decades far from being described by experts. Regarding *Wuthering Heights*, two possible psychological frames can be applied in an attempt to interpret Catherine and Heathcliff's behaviour: firstly, the Attachment Theory and secondly, Sadomasochism. The analysed scenes that follow will illustrate both theories.

James McNierney (2016) is pioneer in applying John Bowlby's and Mary Ainsworth's Attachment Theories to *Wuthering Heights*. Attachment is defined here as the emotional bond between an infant and a caregiving figure, which affects his or her development (McNierney 2). In his work, McNierney coined the term "proto-

attachment narrative" which encompasses those novels that presented "the causal relationship between the quality of a child's attachment-based upbringing and his or her emotional and mental development before the theory was formally described" (McNierney 1). Bowlby foregrounds that "there is abundant evidence to show the kind of care an infant receives from his mother plays a major part in determining the way in which attachment behaviour develops" (qtd. in McNierney 2). Although Bowlby's and Ainsworth's theory was originally aimed at infants, modern attachment theorists like Kathryn Kerns and Rhonda Richardson claim that "attachment complications after infancy still have an impact during young adulthood and even adulthood: development is a lifetime phenomenon" (qtd. in McNierney 6). This quotation points to the idea that the relationships and the events that take place during a child's infancy determine the course of their actions as adults, as well as defining attachment as a cycle. The thesis I am trying to prove is firstly, that Catherine's and Heathcliff's upbringing, along with the incidents they go through as children, shape their future actions, and secondly, that they are prone to transfer their own experience to the next generation since "attachment is a cycle" (6).

Bowlby asserts that if a caregiving figure does not fulfil a child's attachment needs, the child will not develop a healthy attachment mode, making him/her more likely to become a detached caregiving figure. Thus, when Hindley refuses to act as an attached parental figure, Heathcliff "who already possesses a fragile attachment pattern from being orphaned, develops into the novel's central figure of detachment" (qtd. in McNierney 7). Although it is true that he finds some support in Mr Earnshaw, the man seems to be more fascinated with Heathcliff rather than willing to help him adjust to the family. Mr Earnshaw's uneven affection does more harm than good, as it arouses Catherine and Hindley's envy. Nelly defines Heathcliff "as a usurper of his father's

affections and his privileges, that grew bitter with brooding over these injuries" (Brontë 26), not to mention that he gives him the name of his dead son: "I found they had christened him 'Heathcliff': it was the name of a son who died in childhood" (26). Thus, this bond resembles more a maladjustment from the part of Mr Earnshaw than a healthy attachment.

So, the lack of a parental figure during his first years of life along with Hindley's constant abuses and humiliations deprive him of a stable, trustworthy caregiving model, making him the victim of what has been defined by Bowlby as "insecure attachment" (Bowlby 1983; McNierney 2016). This type of attachment is characterized by constant tension, mistrust and reduced emotional and verbal responses that will result in the child being detached from the social environment and in finding great difficulty to develop future relationships (Bowlby qtd. in McNierney 8). For instance, when Heathcliff arrives at the Heights, he is unable to utter any comprehensible language: "it only stared round, and repeated over and over again some gibberish, that nobody could understand" (Brontë 25), thus proving the lack of verbal response. The final confirmation of this detachment comes when he exhaustingly tries and manages to perpetuate his suffering into the next generation, in both Hareton and Linton. As he claims: "now, my bonny lad, you are mine! And we'll see if one tree won't grow as crooked as another, with the same wind to twist it!" (145). However, there is a difference to be made. Heathcliff's behaviour with Linton is what Bataille has defined as "evil with a benefit" since he wants to inherit La Grange: "this benefit is, no doubt, selfish, but it loses its importance if we expect something from it other than Evil itself – if, for example, we expect some advantage from it" (Bataille 11). Yet, Heathcliff deliberately emulates the same unsound pattern of attachment he received as a child towards Hareton with no economic or material purpose, not even revenge, as Hareton is out of the novel's main plot:

> But he's no fool; and I can sympathise with all his feelings, having felt them myself. I know what he suffers now, for though. And he'll never be able to emerge from his bathos of coarseness and ignorance. I've got him faster than his scoundrel of a father secured me, and lower; for he takes a pride in his brutishness. I've taught him to scorn everything extra-animal as silly and weak. (Brontë 159)

Heathcliff's will to inflict the same suffering he endured can be seen as the proof of his inability to deal with his permanent position as an outcast. On the other hand, Catherine's attachment pattern could be labelled as what Bowlby has defined as "secure" (Bowlby 1983; McNierney 2016). Even if the Heights may not be the idyllic example of a common household, her desires and needs as a child seem to have been fulfilled, despite the reigning violence she is exposed to. The six years old Catherine we find at the beginning of the novel is bestowed with high self-esteem, power and often immunity to the consequences of her actions. According to Nelly, she is authoritarian and has a certain charm that makes the others vulnerable to her will: "a wild, wicked slip she was […] but she had the bonniest eye, and the sweetest smile, […] and, after all, I believe she meant no harm" (Brontë 29). In his conversation with Nelly, Heathcliff thinks of Catherine as an outstanding source of sublimity: "she is so immeasurably superior to them – to everybody on earth, is she not, Nelly?" (35), and Catherine muses to herself: "How strange! I thought, though everybody hated and despised each other, they could not avoid loving me" (88). These last words attest to her secure attachment. Moreover, from a neuropsychological perspective, securely attached children are able to integrate more successfully emotional and rational information, reaching homeostasis; i.e. an inner equilibrium, after a traumatic event with far more ease than children with other pattern of attachment (Bowlby 10). So, it is not surprising that Catherine has more tools to cope with her environment than Heathcliff. The point is that although neither of

the children had an ordinary upbringing, Catherine enjoyed certain stability while Heathcliff was demonized from the very first moment he set a foot in the Heights. As Mr Earnshaw claims: "but you must e'en take it as a gift of God; though it's as dark almost as if it came from the devil" (Brontë 25).

Subsequently, Catherine makes the most of her securely based attachment, especially towards Heathcliff, so much so that from her endorsed situation of power she ends up taking the role of the sadist. As mentioned earlier, Catherine exerts power from a very young age while remaining unimpressed by violence. On the other hand, Heathcliff is, at the beginning, a rejected creature with no positive feedback or safe figure to rely on, showing hints of masochism. Emily Brontë's skills and mastery in depicting such behaviours and actions may remain unnoticed unless elaborated more thoroughly. In what follows, then, I will move on to discussing the concepts of sadism and masochism as they prove to be quite useful for my analysis.

2.2 Sadism and Masochism

According to Seichepine, Emily Brontë's vision of childhood "has been claimed to stand in sharp contrast with the vision which then prevailed in literature, for its perversion and narcissism, and even has something pathological about it" (209). Thus, following the attachment patterns that have already been described, the theory of Sadomasochism can help explain the shifts in power between the two protagonists, as well as their inner desires. As Loewenstein points out: "when we speak of masochism we refer to a tendency to seek physical or mental suffering in order to achieve, be it consciously or not, sexual gratification in the widest sense" (35). Moreover, Freud claims that "physical or mental suffering at the hands of the sexual object is a condition for sexual gratification" (Freud qtd. in Loewenstein 35). Therefore, masochism is

perceived as the willing subjugation to the force of the other while finding pleasure in it, whereas sadism is the agency in the exertion of power:

> The sexuality of most male human beings contains an element of aggressiveness – a desire to subjugate; the biological significance of it seems to lie in the end for overcoming the resistance of the sexual object by means other than the process of wooing. Thus sadism would correspond to an aggressive component of the sexual instinct which has become independent and exaggerated and, by displacement, has usurped the leading position. (85)

Being Catherine the child who enjoys a secure attachment, it is not surprising that in her confident and superior position, she develops the role of the sadist, while Heathcliff who is the insecurely attached, portrays the role of the masochist. In the first part of the novel, Catherine is depicted as having sadistic impulses because "childhood in Catherine's case is certainly not synonymous with innocence" (Seichepine 210), while Heathcliff is closer to masochism: "as he becomes increasingly masochistic, Heathcliff also becomes increasingly removed from speaking, reading, and representation in general" (DeRosa 29). However their roles will be inverted after decisive turning points in their lives.

To begin with, when Catherine is described by Nelly, the latter, as a non-reliable narrator, contradicts herself all throughout the novel and, although aware of the misinterpretations made by the characters, she does not intervene to give a resolution, but rather remains silent and lets all hell break loose: "Nelly's description of her little mistress is not to devoid of ambiguity, and this makes the reader feel somewhat puzzled" (Seichepine 210). For instance, in the confession scene Nelly is fully aware that Heathcliff is listening to Catherine's declaration about her intention of marrying Edgar and not Heathcliff but she does not warn the young lady. As she puts it: "I became sensible of Heathcliff's presence. […] He had listened till he heard Catherine

say it would degrade her to marry him, and then he stayed to hear no farther" (Brontë 58). Such mischievous behaviour on Nelly's part matches with the oscillations in Catherine's emotions since she is depicted as a witty child who is well aware of her privileged position while remaining utterly unimpressed by violence, which she uses for her own benefit. Furthermore, as Nelly observes, she seems to find pleasure in mischief and in exerting control from a very young age:

> His [Mr Earnshaw's] peevish reproofs wakened in her a naughty delight to provoke him: she was never so happy as when we were all scolding her at once, and she defying us with her bold, saucy look, and her ready words […] baiting me, and doing just what her father hated most, showing how her pretended insolence, which he thought real, had more power over Heathcliff than his kindness: how the boy would do her bidding in anything. (29)

Particularly, there are two scenes that prove that her delight in pain exceeds a child's expectable curiosity. As Seichepine accurately pinpoints (210), the first setting occurs when Catherine tells Nelly: "if I were in heaven, Nelly, I should be extremely miserable […] heaven did not seem to be my home; and I broke my heart with weeping to come back to earth" (57). In this fragment, she bluntly rejects the idea of heaven as something desirable for her and, accordingly, "she expresses her utter rebellion against convention as she inverts good and evil as well as heaven and hell" (Seichepine 210). So, we should not be surprised that she is attracted to the child that has been defined by her elders as the incarnation of the devil as much as we cannot help but appreciate that her conception of good and evil is somehow deviant, as she proves to long for what has been considered perverse.

The second scene takes place early in the novel when Mr Earnshaw travels to Liverpool and comes back bringing Heathcliff with him. This scene is especially relevant as it depicts both Catherine's sadistic impulses at the tender age of six as well

as Heathcliff's masochism. When Mr Earnshaw enters the door, we are revealed that the gift Catherine asked for before his departure was nothing but a whip, the epitome of domination through violence: "she was hardly six years old, but she could ride any horse in the stable, and she chose a whip" (Brontë 25). As DeRosa asserts:

> She relies on Heathcliff's masochism as much as he relies on her sadism. The first glimpse we get of S/M in the novel is one where sadism and masochism are revealed to be completely interconnected. […] Catherine remains the sadist to her brother's masochist throughout their childhood. (30)

When she learns the master had lost her whip in attending the stranger, Catherine shows her humour "by grinning and spitting at the stupid little thing; earning for her pains a sound blow from her father to teach her cleaner manners" (Brontë 26). In this scene, we can appreciate how Catherine spits enraged at Heathcliff, while Heathcliff shows no physical or verbal reaction, a characteristic symptom of the insecure attachment mentioned before, as well as of masochism. As is well known, literacy and education are closely related to power and so, Catherine speaks and commands while Heathcliff is unable to find the words to defend himself:

> Heathcliff's early years at the Heights are primarily about the acquisition of language, and the simultaneous acquisition of a spine. As he "finds his tongue," he is able to stand up for himself against the abuse that is heaped upon him. In this way, language directly counters the masochistic tendency to seek out/bear/enjoy pain and degradation. (DeRosa 29)

Thus, Heathcliff is repudiated and even denied a bed in his most vulnerable moment, when he arrives at the Heights[2]. This initial reception, apart from the previous endurance of being an orphan, starts to shape his inhibited, masochist attitude in the

[2] It is important to remark here that Nelly, the main narrator, does not even consider Heathcliff as a human being, as she coldly names him "it" four times (47). Similarly, other characters in the novel refer to him as "frightful thing" (91), "hellish villain" (211), "vagabond" (99), "brute beast" (207), "that devil" (317) or as Catherine herself states: "an unreclaimed creature, without refinement, without cultivation, - an arid wilderness of furze and whinstone" (141).

house: “he seemed a sullen, patient child; hardened, perhaps, to ill-treatment: he would stand Hindley’s blows without winking or shedding a tear” (Brontë 26). Relying on Bowlby’s concept of insecure attachment and on the definition of masochism, we find that Heathcliff does not react to the violence inflicted on him but rather accepts it stoically. At one point, Nelly rebukes: “my pinches moved him only to draw in a breath and open his eyes, as if he had hurt himself by accident and nobody was to blame” (26). Anew, we find no hint of physical or verbal response on the part of Heathcliff, not even a flinch. Chronologically, after this initial situation, their relationship evolves and makes them form strong love bonds just when they are not constrained by society, therefore nurturing its wildness. As Bataille puts it:

> The two children spent their time racing wildly on the heath. They abandoned themselves, untrammelled by any restraint or convention […] But, in their innocence, they placed their indestructible love for one another on another level, and indeed perhaps this love can be reduced to the refusal to give up an infantile freedom which had not been amended by the laws of society or of conventional politeness. They led their wild life, outside the world. (11)

They enjoy their mutual affection in the untamed nature, disdaining any punishment that may be inflicted on them: “they both promised fair to grow up as rude as savages […] it was one of their chief amusements to run away to the moors in the morning and remain there all day, and after the punishment grew a mere thing to laugh at” (Brontë 32). So, Heathcliff, as an outcast, discovers in Catherine a strong partner and Catherine finds in Heathcliff a mirror of the most “savage” part of her personality as well as an obeying figure to her sadism, since “the boy would do her bidding in anything” (29). However, one of the turning points of the novel takes place when Catherine spends five weeks at La Grange because of a sprained ankle. They are then twelve and thirteen years old, so they are old enough to understand the system of

hierarchy reigning in the two houses, only that Heathcliff is made painfully aware of his lower condition. Although Heathcliff is constantly humiliated, especially by Hindley, this practice reaches its climax when Catherine comes back to the Heights. Heathcliff is abased by the Lintons: "Mrs Linton begged that her darlings might be kept carefully apart from that naughty swearing boy" (38); by Hindley, who locks him outside: "Cathy, catching a glimpse of her friend in his concealment" (37); and by Catherine, who laughs at his dirtiness: "why, how very black and cross you look! And how – how funny and grim! But that's because I'm used to Edgar and Isabella Linton […] If you wash your face and brush your hair, it will be all right: but you are so dirty!" (37). Heathcliff, in an innocent attempt to cure his embarrassment and be risen to the occasion, tells Nelly: "Nelly, make me decent, I'm going to be good […] I wish I had light hair and a fair skin, and was dressed and behaved as well, and had a chance of being as rich as he will be!" (39) Therefore, the piercing realization that he is considered inferior by his loving partner leaves an indelible mark in Heathcliff, who, being still a child, does not possess and is deprived of the necessary mechanisms to reach a higher social status.

As Lodine-Chaffey states, Catherine, from her confident, superior position, is able to detach herself from Heathcliff when she is made aware of their different social status by the Lintons, (207) and chooses the environment she feels she belongs to. This does not mean that Catherine does no truly love Heathcliff or that she is the one to blame for his behaviour, but that the environment, determinism and social conventions can influence an individual's decision. Further proof of this statement is found in the same scene as Catherine is "forced" to wear a beautiful dress that constrains her movements. In the same way that literacy is linked to Heathcliff's masochism, Catherine's repression of movement is also symbolic, especially through her hat. She

shifts from being a savage child enjoying the wild nature of the Heights to a lady-like creature in an artificial, well-mannered ambiance:

> And commenced her plan of reform by trying to raise her self-respect with fine clothes and flattery, which she took readily; so that, instead of a wild, hatless little savage jumping into the house, and rushing to squeeze us all breathless, there lighted from a black pony a very dignified person, with brown ringlets falling from the cover of feathered beaver, and a long cloth habit, which she was obliged to hold up with both hands that she might sail in […] "Stay, dear, you will disarrange your curls, let me untie your hat. (Brontë 36)

Allegorically, she is removed from action because of her expensive and coercive clothes in parallel with her abandonment of her wild side, the one she shared with Heathcliff. In the same way that Catherine's environment and upbringing makes her choose La Grange, Heathcliff's abusive past makes him unable to cope with rejection, forging a terrible revenge that is about to come. DeRosa accurately points out that Catherine's choice is the trigger that fuels Heathcliff's revenge, who grows significantly more sadist after this event and never stops (DeRosa 31). This scene is considered as the starting point of the reversal of sadist and masochist roles between them.

One of the proofs of Heathcliff's growing sadism comes right afterwards, in one of the most violent scenes in the novel. Hindley is terribly drunk and threatens Nelly with a knife, stealing baby Hareton from her arms. Hindley accidentally drops the baby from the top of the stairs but Heathcliff catches him before he smashes his head to the ground, saving his life. His face after doing so is described as one of pure horror, as he realizes that he has lost a golden opportunity to take revenge against Hindley. Heathcliff is depicted as willing to crush the baby's skull against the stairs but feeling devastated for not having done so:

> Heathcliff arrived underneath just at the critical moment […] It expressed, plainer than words could do, the intensest anguish at having made himself the instrument of thwarting his own revenge. Had it been dark, I daresay he would have tried to remedy the mistake by smashing Hareton's skull on the steps; but, we witnessed his salvation. (Brontë 94)

In this scene Heathcliff has already switched from passivity and inaction to sadism and revenge. This is particularly revealing as he already shows that he is indifferent towards using another creature's suffering for his own benefit, even by taking his life. This acts as a kind of anticipation of the severe cruelty that he will be able to profess in a future, for example towards Isabella, whom he marries only to take revenge on Edgar Linton. Finally, the ultimate turning point in their childhood takes place when Catherine declares her love for Heathcliff to Nelly, unaware that he is listening:

> If all else perished, and he remained, I should still continue to be; and if all else remained, and he were annihilated, the universe would turn to a mighty stranger: I should not seem a part of it […] My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath: a source of little visible delight, but necessary. Nelly, I am Heathcliff! (59)

In this magnificent scene Catherine admits her love for Heathcliff and further acknowledges how the environment is pushing her to choose Edgar: "but did it never strike you that if Heathcliff and I married, we should be beggars? Whereas, if I marry Linton, I can aid Heathcliff to rise, and place him out of my brother's power" (58). Repression is neatly depicted here from both sides. Catherine is repressing what she feels for Heathcliff and insists in marrying Edgar to help Heathcliff, apart from her own benefit. Likewise, instead of facing his own feelings for her, Heathcliff represses them in an unhealthy way and leaves the scene, hearing only half of the conversation. If there are two characters to blame here, it is Nelly, for not warning Catherine, and Heathcliff

for leaving. Heathcliff's abusive past makes him unable to deal with these emotions. Rather, he prefers to repress them and suffer endlessly until the very night Catherine is about to die, in an exercise of both masochism in his undying love for her and of sadism, as it justifies his revenge: "tension between death and representation mounts, and *Wuthering Heights* plays out these paradoxes and anxieties in a text which is anything but simply repressed" (DeRosa 28).

The epitome of the reversal of roles comes as Catherine approaches her death. Catherine is unable to choose between her marriage with Linton and her love for Heathcliff and she lets herself die. De Rosa delves into this shift of roles and suggests that "as Catherine gets closer to her death, she becomes increasingly less sadistic, and increasingly more masochistic. Simultaneously, Heathcliff becomes more and more sadistic. As two sides to the same metaphorical soul, Catherine and Heathcliff can move easily across S/M's separating slash" (31). Not coincidentally, after Edgar and Heathcliff have fought bitterly, Catherine says to Nelly: "I can afford to suffer anything hereafter" (Brontë 87). Catherine's death is but another cunning display of Brontë's ability to shock the readers of the time as half way in the novel the heroine dies. By doing so, she is able to build up an unbearable tension that comes out of a life of repressed feelings that hardly find catharsis. When Heathcliff and Catherine admit their undying love for each other, we see two titanic forces colliding in a paradigmatic scene in which words are astonishingly able to depict the two extremes of love and violence in exquisite ways:

> 'Oh, Cathy! Oh, my life! How can I bear it?' was the first sentence he uttered, in a tone that did not seek to disguise his despair. […] He turned to her, looking absolutely desperate. His eyes wide, and wet at last, flashed fiercely on her; his breast heaved convulsively […] 'You teach me now how cruel you've been – cruel and false. Why did you despise me? Why did you betray

> your own heart, Cathy? I have not one word of comfort. You deserve this. You have killed yourself. Yes, blight you – they'll damn you. You loved me – then what right had you to leave me? […] Because misery, and degradation, and death, and nothing that God or Satan could inflict would have parted us, you, of your own will, did it. I have not broken your heart – you have broken it.' (Brontë 117)

The interacting forces of sadism and masochism fluctuate between the two of them in this scene. They hold each other violently: "Heathcliff had knelt on one knee to embrace her; he attempted to rise, but she seized his hair, and kept him down […] I saw four distinct impressions left blue in the colourless skin" (115, 116), while they accuse the other for their suffering: "(Catherine) I shall not pity you, not I. You have killed me" (115). But, definitely, it is Catherine who becomes the epitome of masochism when she asserts that her death will be her liberation: "I'm tired, tired of being enclosed here. I'm wearing to escape into that glorious world, and to be always there. […] I shall be sorry for you. I shall be incomparably beyond and above you all" (116). On her bed death, both the sadistic and the masochistic forces are transferred to Heathcliff. He reserves his masochism for Catherine, while he exerts his sadism on the rest. The more Heathcliff dwells on his suffering, the crueller he becomes: "Haunt me, then! […] Be with me always – take any form – drive me mad! Only do not leave me in this abyss, where I cannot find you! Oh, God! It is unutterable! I cannot live without my life! I cannot live without my soul!" (122). They have always been a reflection, a part of the other, so now Heathcliff is unable to cope with him being a complete individual, as well as cursing every living creature around him. As Bataille claims, "there is no law or force, no convention or restraining pity which can curb Heathcliff's fury for a single instant – not even death itself" (13).

All in all, Heathcliff closes the cycle of cruelty by transferring his own suffering and upbringing to the next generation. Many critics have focused on Heathcliff's cruelty towards Isabella and Edgar; however, Heathcliff's behaviour is to determine and doom the generations to come. Interestingly, Emily gives us a glimmer of hope with Hareton. He is the only one to break the chains of determinism by learning how to read, which reaffirms the theory of literacy as a symbol for power in the novel (DeRosa 28). In reading, he obtains the necessary force to set himself free from the yoke of determinism and brutality depicted in the novel: "I perceived two such radiant countenances bent over the page of the accepted book, that I did not doubt the treaty had been ratified, on both sides, and the enemies were, thenceforth, sworn allies" (Brontë 229). Such redemptive tone in portraying the character of Hareton serves as the counterpart to Heathcliff's unrepentant trait and restless subversive force: "the end of Emily Brontë's sombre tale is the sudden appearance of a faint ray of light" (Bataille 21). While books enable Hareton to overcome his initial cruel and violent behaviour, Heathcliff is aligned with his inner self as the only means to cope with life. The concepts of life and death only become meaningful for Catherine and Heathcliff as part of an everlasting entity that both impels and expels them from their own environment. Their irreconcilable sadism and masochism are thus the *condition sine qua non* for their own existence.

3. Conclusion

Wuthering Heights is an outstanding literary masterpiece in which Emily Brontë was able to exquisitely construct complex characters without any previous psychological knowledge. Not only did she manage to portray intricate patterns of behaviour but she also rooted them responding coherently to theories that were still unformulated. From the very beginning, she traced a fine logical thread that permeated all the actions in the

novel. However, it is only after an attentive reading that we as readers can commence to infer the obscure mechanisms that govern *Wuthering Heights*.

As I have shown throughout this dissertation, the behaviours of Heathcliff and Catherine can be tackled from psychological theories that highlight their sadistic and masochistic traits as sociocultural and environmental imprints. Emily's portrayal of their human psyches was far ahead her time as she thoroughly illustrated some of the inner workings of these characters, be they an abrupt violence, cruelty or brutality. Significantly, the attachment theory has proven to be successful for my analysis to demonstrate that the first years of life are crucial for a child's future development. In the same way, the theories on sadomasochism have contributed to explaining the shifts in the protagonists' behaviour and relationships. Regarding Catherine, it could be stated that, within the constraining environment she was exposed to, she still had some freedom of choice, while abuse and the lack of a reliable parental figure proves to be deterministic for Heathcliff. However, both characters still had the possibility to overcome their troubled past and oppressive social conventions and become wholesome adults, but they choose not to do so. As psychologist George Kelly points out, "no person needs to be a victim of his or her biography" (1970). Emily Brontë also anticipated this when delving into the lives of the second generation: that is, with the creation of young Catherine and Hareton, she seems to have broken the cycle of cruelty and suffering, thus suggesting an interesting line of research regarding the freedom of will and personal development within deterministic environments.

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